

Statewide System for Vision Services

In the past, decentralized services for blind and visually impaired Iowa students were provided by the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School, the Department for the Blind, the Department of Education, Area Education Agencies (AEAs), and local schools. Service provision lacked coordinated leadership and often resulted in duplication of services or an inequitable distribution of services.

In August 2004, the Board of Regents created the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School (IBSSS) Task Force to examine the future needs and recommend solutions for blind and visually impaired students, including those with multiple disabilities. The Task Force recommended that the Board of Regents and State Board of Education create a Coordinating Council for Vision Services in Iowa to address the issues.

Coordinating Council

During the 2005-2006 academic year, the Board of Regents and the State Board of Education jointly appointed members to the Coordinating Council. The group made six recommendations for a "Preferred Future for Vision Services in Iowa" (see inset).

Statewide System for Vision Services

Through an intergovernmental agreement, the Board of Regents, Department of Education, AEAs, and Department for the Blind agreed to work cooperatively to provide appropriate programs and services for Iowa's blind and visually impaired students. They formed a Management Committee for the Statewide System of Vision Services to provide direction for development, operation, maintenance, and improvement of the Statewide System.

Coordinating Council Recommendations

- Provide appropriate training and support for general classroom and special education teachers, administrators, and area education agency staff working with students that are blind or visually impaired.
- Provide access to the Expanded Core Curriculum (including life skills) and to eliminate geographical differences in the distribution of resources by using regional centers.
- Maximize skill development in activities for daily living, literacy, social skills, and travel skills.
- Centralize the administration and coordination of service providers, assistive technology, and regional centers to allow for the allocation of available resources for maximum effectiveness.
- Coordinate a comprehensive transition to adulthood services with the Department for the Blind.
- Expand early intervention services for birth through age 3, with a focus on families, communication, and social skill development.



The Management Committee is comprised of:

- The Superintendent of the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School serves as the Executive Officer of the Statewide System.
- An AEA chief administrator serves as chair of the Committee.
- An AEA director of special education.
- The chief of the Bureau of Early Childhood Services of the Department of Education.
- The Director of the Department for the Blind.

The Management Committee recommends policies necessary for the operation of the Statewide System. It can recommend changes to services of participating agencies to improve efficiency and effectiveness, including but not limited to: data collection, staffing ratios, unmet needs of eligible students, professional

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More Information

Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School
<http://www.iowa-braille.k12.ia.us>

Department for the Blind
<http://www.blind.state.ia.us/>

Department of Education
<http://www.iowa.gov/educate/>

Area Education Agencies
https://www.edinfo.state.ia.us/web/re_address.asp?b=13&r=all&q=1

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development for staff, recruitment and retention of staff, programming and service options for students, and resource allocation. The Management Committee does not have the authority to commit funding.

Participating Agencies

The participating agencies bring different skills and resources to the System. Through collaboration, they intend to provide an effective and efficient approach to meeting the needs of students that are blind and visually impaired.

Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School – The School was established in 1852 with a campus at Vinton, Iowa. The institution provides a self-contained, residential special education and recreational program for blind and visually impaired students. The special education services operate on both a short-term skill focus model and an extended-stay approach for those with additional needs. The School serves as a resource center for the State, including an accessible library, adaptive equipment center, and a technology lab. It is also a resource center for professional development and consultation services for teachers of the blind or visually impaired in the areas of literacy, mathematics, additional disabilities, adaptive technology, and early childhood.

The Vinton campus is the hub for the implementation of the Statewide System for Vision Services, and the newly hired superintendent allots 60.0% of his time to the IBSSS and 40.0% of his time as the Administrator of the Statewide System.

Area Education Agencies (AEAs) – The AEAs are the lead agencies for identification of children with special needs, including the blind and visually impaired. Some AEAs employ itinerant teachers of the visually impaired that participate in evaluation and assessment of visual functioning, suggest referral for medical or other professional services for habilitation or rehabilitation, and provide training in communication skills, orientation and mobility in all environments, independent living skills, and activation of visual motor abilities. The AEAs also serve as resources for families of the blind and visually impaired.

Department for the Blind – The Department provides consultation services to students beginning at age 14 to help them transition to adult services and works with the AEAs and local school districts to promote independence and preparation for adult life. The Department provides access to instructional materials in Braille, audio, and alternative print formats, and operates an extensive library that it coordinates with the IBSSS collection and makes available through a common web-based check-out process. Other learning opportunities for blind and visually impaired youth are provided through weekend programs and summer activities and camps.

Department of Education – The Department provides leadership and support for the Statewide System, including consultation services, guidance in dealing with federal and State laws and requirements for

provision of services, guidance for early access services for children birth through two and for compliance with federal regulations for children age three to twenty one. It also provides financial support for the Instructional Materials Center in the Department for the Blind.

Student Population

Currently there are 389 students receiving services through the Statewide System for Vision Services. Approximately one-third are blind and two-thirds are visually impaired. About half of these students have additional disabilities and one-third are severely or profoundly handicapped.

All of these students are receiving services from a Teacher of the Visually Impaired, and more than half are receiving services from an Orientation and Mobility Specialist.

The tables below show the age and grade level distribution of blind and visually impaired students.

Age	Number
Birth to 3	54
4 to 9	137
10 to 15	126
16 to 21	72
Total	389

Grade Level	Number
Pre-Kindergarten	91
Kindergarten to 8	203
Grades 9 to 12	95
Total	389

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